

Newsletter of Menai Wildflower Group

February 2017



President's Report

Welcome to Menai Wildflower Group's first newsletter for 2017. I wish you all good health for the New Year as you ponder on the possibilities that wait in your gardens and with your peers.

The committee is concentrating on producing an interesting calendar of events for 2017. This year we are encouraging members to bring in plant material for identification and plant success stories to share with fellow members at our monthly meetings. This sharing experience will strengthen our understanding of plant species and broaden opportunities in growing something different for our gardens. I have always thought of the many different flowering types and colours that have attracted a particular insect like blue banded bees to blue flowers.



Chorizema cordatum, P Pitkeathly

With all the possibilities it is a great opportunity to be part of the Fire Station Nursery where you can try your hand at propagation of your own plant material. The committee is proposing a mid-week propagation session, so keep in mind any thoughts about how you can support and contribute to these activities.

I would like once again to thank the committee for all their enthusiasm and hard work for the previous year, which makes my role of president the easiest in the world. I welcome the

new committee for 2017, as we work together for another successful and enjoyable year.

Jason Cockayne

From the Treasurer

APS NSW has increased the membership fees starting from 1 January 2017 as follows: Individual \$56, Individual concession \$48, Joint \$66, Joint concession \$58. An updated MWG renewal form has been posted on the MWG website.

Sharon Pearson



Crown of Gold (*Barklya syringifolia*), L Hedges.

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Coming Local Events

(See Special Interest for others)

4 Feb Working Bee at IRFS 9am start
(there will be additional working bees to prepare for the Quarterly Gathering so please contact Lloyd if you might be available at other times)

4 Feb Propagation at IRFS nursery 1pm
(learn some new techniques from Cris Breitenbach)

8 Feb Menai Wildflower Group meeting
Bruce Higgs of Darvill Nursery on the topic of Plant Nutrition

21 Feb APS Quarterly Meeting IRFS 1pm

4 Mar Working Bee at IRFS 9am start

4 Mar Propagation at IRFS nursery 1pm

8 Mar Menai Wildflower Group meeting
Jason will be speaking on Stanley Island- Yindayin. This is one of the seven remote and ruggedly attractive islands, which form the rich cultural landscape of Flinders Group National Park in north Queensland.

Christmas Social Evening

The Christmas social was well attended; we even had Santa making an appearance in the background. The food was a delicious feast, the conversations were equally enjoyable and we had an interesting talk on a rare cycad, *Macrozamia humilis*, from East Hills member, Kyrill Taylor. He has had one in a pot for many years and brought it along to show its flower. This year's calendar was unveiled and the talented winners presented with their rewards. Although great photographs were submitted by all entrants, the winners were – David Forbes, John Prats, Karlo Taliana, Alan Ferguson and Lloyd Hedges. Congratulations to all entrants and thanks to the production team.



It was also an opportunity to award Lloyd Hedges, Mary Hedges and Pam Pitkeathly well deserved Life Memberships for their many and various contributions to the club. Lloyd incidentally has also received recognition for 15 years of Bushcare service and a Hughes award (again!).



New life members; Mary, Pam and Lloyd

Thanks to the many who made the night so pleasant.

APS Quarterly Meeting

Keep Saturday, 25 February free for the APS Quarterly Meeting to be held at the Fire Station.

For the hardy, the day will start at 9:30am with a 2km medium grade walk, through shady open forest to the aboriginal engravings on Barden Creek. This walk is subject to numbers and weather so if you want to participate, please contact menaiwildflower@austplants.com.au.

Lloyd will be talking about the amazing and beautiful Pink Flannel Flowers which he has successfully cultivated: what are the secrets of these magic mountain plants? This talk will be after APS general business at 1pm.



Pink flannel flower, J Prats

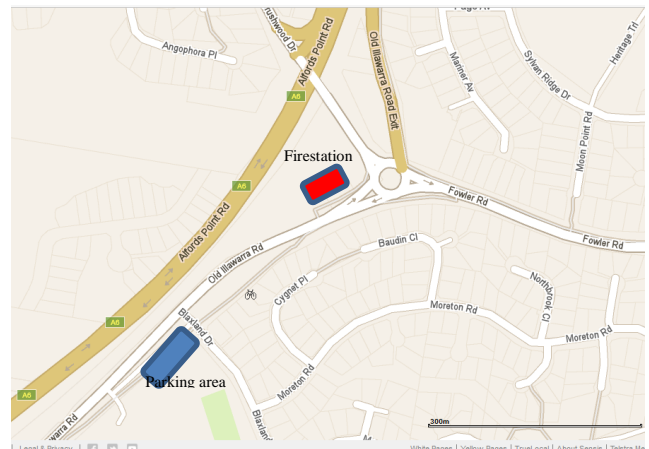
From 11am the gardens will be open and you will also be able to see Mary Hedges and Jennifer Maclaine-Cross creating beautiful art based on Australia's amazing plants or pick up one of our discounted calendars featuring local plants or Margaret Bradhurst's excellent book *Orchids of Southern Sydney*.

Although there won't be a lot of flowers out, the mounds are well worth a visit; the garden team are justly proud of their progress, along with the compound garden and as usual, if you are inspired, plants will be for sale or you can check out the nursery. We are hoping to have some special grafted grevilleas for sale.

Tea and coffee will be available from 11am and there will be limited seating and tables inside and out so you can bring your own lunch and enjoy it in the garden. Alternately take a picnic down to the river at Delardes Reserve in Griffin Pde. Head towards Illawong on Fowler Rd then turn down Old Ferry Rd and right into Griffin Pde. Several members are Bushcare volunteers at this site where they found *Pterostylis ophioglossa* (Snake's tongue orchid), only the second place it has been found in the Sydney region. Other lunch options are available at Illawong shopping centre, about 1km down Fowler Rd or a bit further afield at Menai

shopping centre. Afternoon tea will be served after the conclusion of the meeting.

Because we have limited car parking at the firestation, we would like to keep it for the less mobile and request that if you are able to, please use the **parking area for the playing fields**. If you are arriving across the Alford's Point Bridge, exit the Illawong roundabout on to Old Illawarra Rd, keep going past the firestation and enter the parking area on the left just past Blaxland Dr. Coming from the south along Old Illawarra Rd, simply turn into the car park, just after the playing field of Menai High School.



Favourites in the Fire Station Garden

Nearly every time I walk around the Illawong Rural Fire Station there is some new plant in flower looking magnificent, which I fall in love with, and wish we could find a spot to grow it at home. Then the next time there is another beautiful flowering plant and the previous one may only have a few flowers remaining.

But the smallish shrub *Homoranthus darwinoides*, on your right as you walk in from the road, has always been covered in flowers. It isn't spectacular. It doesn't leap at your eye and stun you with its beauty as, for example, some of the grevilleas do. Its flowers are smaller and more subtly coloured, shades of red and cream. But they are lovely, dainty and scattered profusely over the bush. The foliage is also dainty, a pretty green, and the whole effect is very attractive. Lloyd says they don't photograph well because they are small and not brightly coloured and you do have to come close and look at them, but to my mind they are among the prettiest flowers I know.

They are visited by lots of small honey eaters, look good in a vase and last well. Do you want a pretty little flower for a “miniature” display for the Easter Show, which is in April when practically nothing is in flower? Try the *H. darwinoides* at the fire station.



Close up of flower of *Homoranthus darwinoides*, L Hedges.

Elliot & Jones, in Encyclopedia of Australian Plants Vol 5, say “This charming species, with sweetly fruity aromatic foliage, occurs on the Central Western slopes and the Great Dividing Range between Dubbo and Putty, where it grows in exposed and sheltered areas” (Doesn’t seem fussy, does it?). Also “It adapts well to most freely draining acidic soil types, in open or semi-shaded sites, in subtropical and temperate regions” and “although appreciative of moist soils, it tolerates extended dry periods and is hardy to moderately heavy frosts”. “Propagate from seed or cuttings”.

Lloyd thinks it has been there at the fire station since we first planted there, about 10 years ago, and he hasn’t attended to it in any way since. It responds well to pruning if you want a more compact plant, but our one is what you get if you neglect it for 10 years. And it looks to be going well for another 10.

Mary Hedges

The Laissez Faire Gardener

Life’s little joys come from the somewhat unexpected such as taming wildflowers. As they are part of the supreme Maker’s grand design I tend to rely on his input quite a lot to care for them. Experimentation also plays a part in the overall excitement when a plant actually survives to give you a glorious patch of colour in your garden.

Experts advise on their suitable soil types, sun, water, drainage and pruning but having a yard with characteristics of questionable parentage I often rely on pot-luck. If it survives, good show; if not, try again in a different position.

Why do I challenge the norm and advice so much? Nearly every time I do plant following the rules the environment changes after the planting; shade patterns change, weather mucks everything up, and stampeding animals do their little bit. Every success is a real JOY.

Alan Ferguson

Flowers for the vase

When I delivered the last of 2016’s newsletter proof reading to Mr Ed. he gave me a few specimens of the Ferg’s kangaroo paw blooms to brighten up my unit. These specimens were at least one metre tall, red, yellow and pink. I combined these with a few prunings from my Albany woollybush and was happy with the result.

Now I can report that this arrangement is still hanging in there, not even looking like a dried flower arrangement yet! For me, this has been adequate proof of the viability of native flowers for indoor use: 4 to 5 weeks of pleasure for me.

Pam Pitkeathly

Bushcare

Several of our members are involved in SSC Bushcare groups including Loudon Ave and Delardes Reserve at Illawong. New volunteers are always welcome – not only do you learn more about native plants and weed removal, you engage in interesting conversations and there’s usually delicious home cooked snacks.

In December some of us trialled a new site at Bradley Close, Illawong. Seven volunteers

turned up to join Bushcare Officer Brad Van Luyt: Pam F, Greg, Lloyd, John P and 2 of John's neighbours.

The site commenced because of John Prats' interest in his local valley. The site comprises a narrow strip of bush between the Close and a steep drop off into a valley that leads down to the Woronora River and it offered the prospect of a positive result in a short time frame.



Bushcare Xmas at Bradley Close

The strip contains a number of weed species including Asparagus fern which became our first target species. We relieved a sizable area of bush of its Asparagus fern load in the 3 hours we were there – a promising start. At that rate (3hours/month) I think the area could be looking pretty good in a year or two.

If you are interested in some bush regen, check out the information on Sutherland Council's website

Recycling Opportunity

If anyone wants to recycle used plastic pots, any size, please give them a rough rinse and leave them at the compound (which is open for working bees and propagation days as well as some meetings). Jason will take them to his depot for recycling.

Special Interest

Deadline for contributions to next newsletter is Monday, 20 March.

Any items suitable for inclusion in the newsletter may be sent to the Editor (Post to Secretary or e-mail mwfeditor@gmail.com) before the deadline.

Working Bees on first Saturday of month at IRFB start at 9am and include weeding, mulching and munching.

Propagation days are now a regular part of running the nursery at Illawong Rural Fire Station. The next two will be at 1pm on Saturdays 4 February and 4 March.

A **regular mid-week propagation day** has been proposed and a suitable day is being discussed. Cris B's propagation afternoon on 4 February would be a good opportunity to pick up some tips on starting and decide on a suitable day. Please contact Pam Pitkeathly if you are interested in being involved even if you can't make that Saturday – phone 9771-9789 or email pit.keath@bigpond.com

Nursery group at the Tip Nursery. Please contact Lloyd Hedges if you wish to start attending.

Keep up to date with our **Facebook page** or use our **website** which can be easily accessed using an internet search for the phrase "Menai Wildflower Group" and selecting what should be the first option offered.

Group Meetings

Meetings are held at the Illawong Rural Fire Brigade each month except January. Most meetings are held on the second Wednesday at 7:00pm. The three winter meetings: June, July, August are held on the second Saturday of the month at 1pm.

The venue is the Illawong Rural Fire Brigade Headquarters. New members and friends are welcome.



Visit a neighbouring group

When you joined the Menai Wildflower Group you became a member of the NSW APS and therefore are welcome at other APS group

meetings, bushwalks, etc. This gives members a lot more activities to participate in.

Visit the APS NSW website www.austplant.com.au/ and check out what other districts are doing, particularly our neighbours East Hills and Sutherland:

<http://easthills.austplants.com.au/>

<http://sutherland.austplants.com.au/> .

Lloyd Hedges

Nursery Report

BE PREPARED; that's the Girl Scouts Marching Song but also a useful precept for nursery operators. Inorganic materials have a mind of their own. In near two decades at the Tip Nursery I have encountered numerous cases of the watering system failing to deliver, but this time, while I was away down the South Coast it failed to **stop** watering in the glass house.

Ron checked mid-week to find the misters had been on continuously for days and the glass house was awash. As the glasshouse watering system cannot be isolated there was no other choice than to move the glass house contents to our newly finished propagation bed at the IRFS, turn the watering system off and come in each day to water. Ron saved the day and very little was lost – just as well as these trays contained much of the NP's seeds for Dharawal and Five Islands National Parks autumn planting.

Beside a Gold star for Ron, Marian W gets one as well! When I tried to fix the system it proved unresponsive on the day, so in desperation I turned to Marian and asked if she had any chewing gum. She located an old packet in her car and I used it to block up the misting jets in the glass house so the automatic watering system could be turned on to keep the plants alive in the rest of the nursery.



Hopefully I have now fixed the system and after a watching period the glass house beds will be refilled.

Lloyd Hedges



Firestation garden, Eremophila nivea, L. Hedges.

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